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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [BL](#)  
SUBJECT: BOLIVIA: NATIONAL OPPOSITION PARTY IN DISARRAY

REF: A. LAPAZ 1082  
[1](#)B. LAPAZ 1129  
[1](#)C. LAPAZ 464

Classified By: ECOPOL CHIEF MIKE HAMMER FOR REASONS 1.4(B,D.)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY. After opposition party PODEMOS failed to collect and submit the required 58,000 signatures to maintain legal status, the Bolivian National Electoral Court stripped PODEMOS of its legal political party status. Evo's August 10 recall referendum victory was an especially hard defeat for PODEMOS leader and ex-President Jorge "Tuto" Quiroga, the architect of the opposition's failed strategy. As PODEMOS works to determine its future direction and how to stay in the game, it urgently needs to address growing internal conflicts among its departmental prefects and its national and congressional leadership. END SUMMARY.

No More (Legal) PODEMOS Party  
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[1](#)2. (U) Established in December 2005, the Democratic and Social Power (PODEMOS) political party rose from the ashes of Hugo Banzar's National Democratic Action Party (ADN) and began the process of becoming a formal political organization in August 2007. In accordance with Bolivian law, the National Electoral Court provided PODEMOS on December 17, 2007 with the books to collect the required 58,000 signatures within a 180-day period to maintain its official political party status. On August 18, 2008, leading newspaper La Razon revealed that PODEMOS failed to provide the Electoral Court with the required signatures, consequently losing its legal status as a political party July 21.

[1](#)3. (C) PODEMOS Senator Walter Guiteras asserted that PODEMOS did not present the books of signatures to the National Court due to differences with the Court's new Morales-appointed President Jose Luis Exeni. Gustavo Aliaga, Chief of Staff to PODEMOS's President Jorge "Tuto" Quiroga, told EmbOff that the announcement of PODEMOS' failure to collect the required signatures was a political action (from an unknown source) meant to debilitate PODEMOS. Aliaga is nevertheless confident that the party will survive.

&We Still Have a Chance, We Still Have Power8  
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[1](#)4. (SBU) PODEMOS Congressman Fernando Messmer recognized the

party is going through a difficult time, but publicly stated "we are far from disappearing from the political scene, we still have one-third of Congress." Highlighting their continued majority in the Senate, Messmer believes PODEMOS is still "capable of stopping" the ruling Movement Towards Socialism (MAS) party from securing important leadership seats, including the prefect (governor) positions in the recent recall referenda. PODEMOS holds 13 of 27 seats in the Senate and 43 of 130 seats in the lower house.

#### Rival Party: PODEMOS in Denial About its "Extinction"

15. (C) National Unity (UN) Deputy Maldonado told us the August 10 recall was an "atom bomb" that "completely disintegrated PODEMOS." Maldonado asserted that the August 10 recall referenda represents "the extinction of an important party" and that the opposition needs to redirect its strategy at the departmental and national levels. National Unity leader Jaime Navarro told EmbOff that he sees the "PODEMOS crisis as an opportunity, we will transition the power to an opposition that is more rational for the country."

#### Political Miscalculation Lost Regional Support

16. (C) PODEMOS, Aliaga recognizes that there are essentially two kinds of opposition in Bolivia ) in the regional departments and in Congress - and that there is a serious divide between the two. The regional opposition is still bitter over the national leadership's decision to ignore their concerns and approve the recall referenda with voting rules that favored President Evo Morales and disadvantaged the prefects (ref b). PODEMOS Deputy Walter Arrazola said that "PODEMOS has lost its electorate for its unwise decisions." This lack of coordination and consultation between the departments and the national party has created internal friction that may be irreparable.

#### Regional Reactions and Congressional Cleavages

17. (C) Despite PODEMOS leaders, stated faith in their political party's survival, PODEMOS is facing problems garnering regional leadership support. To date, three prefects ) Leopoldo Fernandez (Pando), Ernesto Suarez (Beni) and Jose Luis Paredes (La Paz) ) have distanced themselves from the party and are claiming to have broken relations with PODEMOS. Social and political groups, such as Siglo XXI, MNR, and MPC have left the PODEMOS alliance. PODEMOS recognizes the growing power of the regional opposition, but the lack of trust and unity between the regional and national leaders is negatively affecting their potential effectiveness. Aliaga believes that Santa Cruz Prefect Ruben Costas overreacted over the recall referenda's results. PODEMOS Senator Roger Pinto told PolOff that PODEMOS has been trying to push more inclusive, moderate speaking points for the prefects, but that Costas has ignored the advice since August 10, making Evo's speeches look more reasonable by comparison.

18. (C) Not only is PODEMOS experiencing problems with its prefects, it is also divided in Congress. According to the UN's Maldonado, PODEMOS is "completely" fragmented into four or five different camps in the Chamber of Deputies, which increasingly act independently of the party. Although he contended the Senate is more stable for PODEMOS due to a closer network of personal ties, Maldonado said the August 10 results are already having Senate ramifications, pointing to the MNR's August 18 statement that it would not be working with PODEMOS in the Senate. Besides the possibility of UN and MNR (with one Senate seat each), changing alliances, Maldonado said there are some disaffected/opportunistic PODEMOS senators that could be swayed in a power-sharing deal with the MAS, upsetting PODEMOS's razor-thin majority. He speculated that Senate President Oscar Ortiz (PODEMOS) was no longer dealing from a position of strength and was vulnerable

to being sacked before the end of his 2008 term, although in all likelihood Ortiz would manage to stay on.

#### Logic or Lack Thereof in the National PODEMOS Party

¶9. (C) National PODEMOS leaders have tried unconvincingly to put the crushing recall loss in a positive light. PODEMOS political operative Javier Flores told PolOff the opposition "learned a lot" from the recall that it can use in the next round of elections and that the recall helped galvanize the opposition. Peter Maldonado rejects such silver linings as "nonsense" and asserted the recall only ensured and accelerated PODEMOS's and Tuto's demise.

#### Tuto's Wobbly Leadership

¶10. (C) In founding PODEMOS in 2005, Jorge "Tuto" Quiroga sought reelection as President. Continued internal conflicts and lack of faith in Tuto's leadership make any future aspirations bleak. Tuto ally Senator Walter Guiteras asserts that Quiroga will not run for office if there is no clear possibility of success. Tuto's decision (and mistake) to move forward with the recall referenda clearly undermined his leadership in the eyes of his supporters. Reflecting the sentiments of most in the regional opposition and political punditry, UN Deputy Maldonado told PolOff that Quiroga was an "idiot" for allowing the recall referenda to proceed and this "is Tuto's referendum and he will have to take responsibility for it." Maldonado also stated Tuto's financial base is drying up, as business sector supporters from the Media Luna have lost confidence in him and stopped sending checks. UN: Collateral Damage From "Tuto's Referendum"

¶11. (C) Maldonado said fractures in the UN, exacerbated by "Tuto's recall referendum," are nearly as bad as in PODEMOS the difference being the UN has succeeded in "keeping our problems out of the public light." He characterized the UN as being a "groggy boxer" that is "disoriented." Maldonado added UN leadership is about evenly split about continuing an alliance with PODEMOS or entering into a new partnership with the MAS.

#### MAS to PODEMOS: RIP

¶12. (C) MAS Deputy Ramiro Venegas told PolOff that PODEMOS losing its legal status was "only a matter of time" since PODEMOS "never really was a party in the first place," rather a loose collection of different interests awkwardly banded together by Quiroga's organizational machine/money. He said it was only "natural" that PODEMOS would fade away with its "humiliated" leader Quiroga.

#### MAS Pushing Forward While the Opposition Snoozes

¶13. (SBU) Congress authorized Vice President Alvaro Garcia Linera August 20 to conduct a selection process to fill vacancies in judicial and electoral courts. PODEMOS deputies claimed there was some confusion during the voting of the resolution, causing them to react too late to stop the move. MAS Deputy Gustavo Torrico mocked the opposition for not staying fully alert during the sessions, adding "if you snooze, you lose." MAS also plans to call for a Constitutional Referendum within the next few days, "even if the PODEMOS zombies regret it." MAS is taking full advantage of the opposition's disintegration to push its political agenda in Congress.

#### Comment

¶14. (C) Although the media is likely overplaying the end of PODEMOS, the damage to the party is substantial and it will have a difficult time reorienting itself. Growing division

between the regional and national levels is having serious effects on the party's ability to present a united front. Talk of "unity" appears to be targeted at getting prefects to fall in line with a national leadership that recognizes, resents, and fears growing regional power. If Evo Morales achieves a new constitution in 2008 or early 2009, PODEMOS's acceptance of the recall referenda, and the party's subsequent implosion, will have been in vain.

¶15. (C) PODEMOS is also losing support in Congress and putting at risk one of the opposition's last bastions to counter government power. Allies are leaving PODEMOS and beginning to reorient their strategies in the post-PODEMOS era. The UN party appears to welcome the "extinction" of PODEMOS as the two party leaders - National Unity Doria Medina and PODEMOS "Tuto" Quiroga - share a mutual disdain. Pundits often ask if the MAS would exist without Evo holding it together; now we are faced with the same question about PODEMOS and its discounted leader Quiroga. END COMMENT.  
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